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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 1382
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 2610
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SIPDIS

FOR ADM KEATING FROM AMB JOHN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND SCENESETTER FOR ADMIRAL KEATING

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Admiral Keating: we look forward to welcoming you to Thailand. Your visit, particularly the planned meeting with PM Abhisit Vejjajiva on February 17, will afford the opportunity to highlight the importance of Thailand to our regional security interests as new governments settle in in both countries. Expected meetings with Minister of Defense General (Ret.) Prawit Wongsuwan and RTARF Chief of Defense Forces General Songkitti Jaggabartra will allow you to emphasize our support for important areas of our mil-mil relationship, such as the Defense Reform Management Study (DRMS), Cobra Gold, and Thailand's deployment of peacekeepers to Darfur. What follows are brief thoughts on a number of issues which may come up during your visit. Regards, Ambassador Eric John.

NEW ADMINISTRATIONS IN BOTH COUNTRIES

12. (C) Thai officials have expressed strong interest in hearing an assessment of the new administration's Asia policy; your visit will occur at the same time as Secretary Clinton's inaugural visit to Asia. You can stress to the Thai the lasting value we place on our long-time alliance relationship and that we do not anticipate significant changes in our partnership, due the nature of long-standing U.S.-Thai security, economic, and cultural bonds.

13. (C) The December 2008 installation of the Democrat-led coalition government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has calmed the political situation for now, but the basic split in Thai society and the body politic remains. PM Abhisit is off to a reasonably good start in his first six weeks in office, but his government faces significant policy challenges and a tough economic situation. Political discord could very well persist for years, through what promises to be a messy transition after the eventual passing of revered King Bhumibol.

SOUTHERN THAILAND - MORE SERIOUS INTENT

14. (S) The most significant policy shift under PM Abhisit has been an emphasis on addressing the southern violence,

including significant civilian involvement and revived secret discussions with representatives of southern insurgents started by former PM Surayud. However, it remains unclear how the civil-military dynamic will change. The Thai military has tried to quell the ethnic Malay Muslim-led insurgency in southern Thailand with increasingly effective security sweeps, but occasional abuses by security forces have added to the sense of grievance and lack of justice by the local populace. The root causes of the insurgency -- government neglect and a lack of social justice, combined with a desire for some form of self-determination, have not been effectively addressed by any Thai government to this point.

15. (C) The Thai remain sensitive to any perceived U.S. involvement in the south, and we should not lean too far forward in offering assistance. We have responded by helping the Thai military focus on improving the professional and operational skills of the Royal Thai Armed Forces; helping break down stovepipes between the Thai military, police forces, and civilian agencies; and by pressing for respect of international human rights norms.

ROHINGYA/HMONG CONCERNS PERSIST

16. (C) Of late Thai security force actions regarding Rohingya "boat people," including maritime pushbacks, have resulted in strong criticism of Thailand. We continue to stress to our contacts that Thailand should provide access for UNHCR to

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Rohingya who reach Thai shores, and that push-outs to sea are not consistent with basic humanitarian principles.

17. (C) Due to inherent institutional capabilities, the Thai military plays a prominent role in the management of the many refugees that enter Thailand from neighboring countries. The Thai government has so far failed set up a transparent screening process for the thousands of Lao Hmong, some of whom we believe may have a legitimate claim to refugee status, who seek resettlement in the U.S. You should underscore the importance of transparently handling these Hmong cases.

BORDER TALKS CONTINUE WITH CAMBODIA

18. (C) Thailand and Cambodia held Joint Border Commission (JBC) and Defense Minister talks February 2-6 in an attempt to address the border dispute centered on overlapping claims to territory adjacent to Preah Vihear temple. The JBC talks stalled after the two sides failed to agree on an official name for the temple and for a monitoring mechanism that would replace troops positioned at the temple. That said, we are pleased that atmosphere surrounding the issue has improved dramatically since clashes between troops in 2008. You could stress to the Thai interlocutors our hope that the dispute can be resolved peacefully and bilaterally.

PEACEKEEPING EFFORTS - DARFUR

19. (C) The Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters (RTARF) has been a close partner for us as the Thai government prepares to deploy a battalion of peacekeeping troops to Darfur. The RTARF has taken a measured approach during preparations, one reflective of the significant challenges the Thai military will face in Darfur, and the most likely timeframe for deployment is mid-2009. You could thank the Thai for their willingness to assume this difficult mission and reiterate that we stand ready to assist where possible in the hope that the Thai battalion will be deployed as quickly as reasonably possible.

DEFENSE REFORM

¶10. (C) We have been working closely with the RTARF on the U.S.-funded Defense Resource Management System (DRMS) project which will help rationalize the Thai military's procurement and other resource needs. Phase II of this process will begin the first week of March following the ASEAN summit scheduled for Thailand. You could take the opportunity during your meetings with DefMin Prawit and GEN Songkitti to reinforce our message that we desire to work closely with the Thai to accelerate the DRMS process.

INTEROPERABILITY

¶11. (SBU) The U.S. remains the country of first choice for arms procurement by the military, and has more than \$2 billion of arms procurements currently in process. In recent years, however, the Thai military has diversified procurements. We continue to look at ways to improve interoperability with the Thai military, one example of which is our encouragement of the Thai Air Force to choose a Mid-Life Update to F-16s.

THE INCREASING ROLE OF CHINA

¶12. (C) Thailand continues to develop closer relations with China while simultaneously emphasizing the vital role of the U.S. in the region. The military is part of this trend, both in terms of weapons procurement and, more recently, joint

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exercises. Your interaction with GEN Songkitti, in particular, would be a prime opportunity to explore Thai military thoughts on the future direction of engagement with the PLA.

JOHN